

“You Have Been Rescued”

Galatians 1:11-24

Because Easter was so early, we were actually able to start at the beginning of the Pentecost lectionary series this year. Usually we miss the first part of Galatians. This year we will read Galatians six weeks in a row and almost read the entire letter. Paul’s letter to the Galatians is a wonderful message of Christ justifying us, declaring us not guilty, by grace through faith, apart from the works of the Law. A common theme in Paul’s letters.

The Law brings to you the reality of sin and curse rather than the reality of righteousness. The Law doesn’t only condemn, but it always condemns. It always points its finger and says, “You are a poor, miserable sinner who deserves death and hell.” The Law can also point us to works that are pleasing to God which the Holy Spirit inspires us to do, but only the Gospel can rescue us from this “present evil age.”

That is how Paul began his letter, words we heard last week. You have been rescued from this present evil age. What do you mean we have been rescued from this present evil age? I am still living in the present evil age. I see evil all around me. The news is filled with war and tragedy.

Family, friends, loved ones suffer, grow weak, die. I suffer, grow weak, grow old, feel the need to purchase more life insurance. What do you mean I have been rescued from the present evil age?

It is all about what the Gospel is. The Gospel which Paul received from Jesus Christ is not a feel-good story to help get you through the tough times of life. It is not a how-to manual to do good in the sight of God. It is not a how-to manual to give you the steps to possess God's grace and favor.

The Gospel is the simultaneously beautiful and ugly reality that God your Father loves you so much that He sent His only-begotten Son to suffer unspeakable pain, humiliation, and death as He is nailed to the altar of the cross as the one, final Lamb of sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

This is not man's Gospel. This Good News comes directly from God. And it is Good News, not just because your sin is paid for, but Christ rose from the dead. Just like the young boy in the days of Elijah or the widow's son at Nain, God has power over life and death. God has power over your life and death. Because Christ has come, you have been rescued from this present evil age.

And don't let anyone say, "but I am such a horrible sinner, or I have done so many things that the church would fall in or God will shoot lightning bolts if I walked through these doors." The one good thing about such a statement is that the person saying such things at least have a sense of

reality regarding the Law. They deserve a lightning bolt, but so do you, and so do I. And so did St. Paul.

Listen to him. He openly says, “I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.” If God chose him, he certainly can work with you. If you don’t believe that the grace of God, the sacrifice of the Son of God on the altar of the cross is sufficient for your sin, then the real problem isn’t that you are viewing your sin as being too big, the reality is that you are viewing God’s power and grace as being too small.

I truly do believe that this is the real issue, the stumbling block, which many people have when pondering the Law and the Gospel. God is viewed as being small. Last week, we heard King Solomon say, as he was dedicating the Temple in Jerusalem, “heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built?”

That is the reality of God. Not even heaven can contain Him. As I like to say, “He stretches beyond the borders of the universe.” His power is incomprehensible. The demands of His Law are incomprehensible, and we miserably fall short. His grace is equally incomprehensible. It is sufficient to cover the sin of Adam, the sin of St. Paul. Jesus can speak and the boy at Nain rises from the dead. God’s Word tells us that the blood of Christ was and is sufficient to cover the sins of the whole world, even those who lived in Old Testament times. The blood of Christ established an everlasting covenant with all of mankind.

If anyone would say, “My sins are too big, too many.” Listen to the witness of Scripture. Listen to the witness of St. Paul. By God’s grace, by this undeserved gift, he is saved. He is rescued from this present evil age. By God’s grace, through no work of your own; simply on account of the love and compassion of your heavenly Father, He chose you and He sent His Son to pay a price for your sin which you could not pay. There is no one who can rightly say, “My sins are too great.” Or say, “I am beyond forgiveness. It’s too late for me.” Or say, “God wouldn’t want a person like me.” You are all sought after by God.

His greatest desire is to show mercy and forgive. And since there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood, the Law of God demanded an unblemished, bloody sacrifice. The Gospel is this simultaneously beautiful and ugly reality. The Gospel is beautiful. The love of God is beautiful. However, His mercy, grace, and compassion came in the ugliest way so as to free us from the ugliness of sin.

And now that the ugliness of this present evil age has been dealt with through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, the power of God to raise the dead will one day be on full display. There will come a day when Christ will say to all of us, “Arise.” And those who have died in Christ will rise, and will speak, and will sing for joy.

This is the message of the Gospel. The crucified and risen Christ has overcome this present evil age. Amen.